

NICARAGUAN INDIANS TELL STORY OF REPRESSION
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WASHINGTON

Two Nicaraguan Miskito Indians said their villages were attacked by Sandinista troops armed with tanks and mortars last month along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border, forcing villagers to flee into Honduras.

The Miskitos, village leaders from the towns of Bilwaskarma and Wasla, held a news conference on Capitol Hill along with Indian rebel leader Brooklyn Rivera, to draw attention to charges that Sandinista troops have stepped up repression against Miskito Indian villages the government charges are harboring armed rebels.

Stetchy reports from the region over the past two weeks indicate Sandinista troops planned to attack Indian rebel base camps across the Honduran border in the Atlantic coast area, but got bogged down by rebel troops just inside Nicaragua.

A report released by the human rights group, America's Watch, based on interviews with refugees who recently crossed into Honduras, said the Kisan Indian rebel group had base camps in both towns, buttressing Nicaraguan government versions that the attacks were directed against rebel military targets.

Guillermo Chow, the Bilwaskarma village leader, said Sandinista troops entered his village before dawn March 25 armed with tanks and mortars, forcing the town's 135 families to cross the nearby Coco River, which divides Nicaragua and Honduras, by canoe. He gave no casualty count, but said at least some villagers were wounded in the assault.

Chow said rebels in the town were visiting family members, and he denied the presence of a rebel base.

Enrique Alban, leader of the nearby town of Wasla, said villagers crossed into Honduras after Sandinista troops launched an assault on his village on the evening of March 25 with tanks, and said two men died.

Alban said that as he crawled out of the village for cover in the nearby bush, he saw two men he said wore patches with red crosses on their arms. The report led Misurasata rebel leader Rivera to conclude that Sandinista troops disguised themselves as Nicaraguan Red Cross volunteers. But Alban said he could not determine whether they wore Red Cross uniforms, due to heavy fog.

Miskito Indians, mostly subsistence farmers, turned against the revolutionary government in Managua in 1982 after it forcibly relocated thousands of Miskito Indians from their villages along the Coco River in a bid to deny support for rebel forces operating in the region.

Thousands were moved to resettlement camps away from the border, while thousands of others crossed into Honduras and sought refuge with the United Nations High Commission on Refugees.

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But last year, as the government entered negotiations with Indian rebel groups, the Sandinistas apparently bowed to rebel demands and allowed thousands of Indians to resettle along the Coco River area. The Nicaraguan government has pointed to the resettlement efforts as proof that relations with the Indians are improving.

But in its report, America's Watch charged that the U.S.-backed rebels began "spreading rumors" of impending Sandinista attacks as early as December in a bid to disrupt the resettlement effort.

America's Watch said the Contra rebels "had spread fear as part of a deliberate plan to evacuate the Miskitos from Nicaragua to Honduras" where the rebels are based.

Over the past year, government and rebel troops have also established ceasefire agreements, which have since largely broken down.

Nicaraguan embassy spokesman Fransisco Campbell said, "I have no direct information about these supposed attacks. But I can assure you that it has always been Sandinista policy to attack only counterrevolutionary targets which are attacking our people, following instructions of the CIA. "